RELIGIOUS AND ECCLESIASTICAL VOCATION

VERMEERSCH

Religious and Ecclesiastical Vocation

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN BY

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This treatise on Religious and Ecclesiastical Vocation, by the Rev. Dr. Arthur Vermeersch, S. J., now Professor of Moral Theology in the Gregorian University, gives us in brief but comprehensive form the most authoritative utterances on the question of vocation, especially of vocation to the religious state.

The matter of the treatise first appeared in Dr. Vermeersch's work "De Religiosis," Vol. II, Suppl. 3 (4th edition), and in his Commentary, "De Religiosis et Missionariis—Supplementa et Monumenta Periodica," Vols. VI and VII. Later the matter was gathered and republished as a separate booklet under the title, "De Vocatione Religiosa et Sacerdotali" (Bayaert, Bruges). It is hoped that this translation of the second edition of this booklet may prove useful to many who have not ready access to the original.

THE TRANSLATOR

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PART I

RELIGIOUS VOCATION

There is no lack of competent authorities who have treated this subject, in fact, the very number of writers has engendered a certain obscurity. Because of this obscurity in a matter of such importance, we shall endeavor to shed fresh light on the subject by showing what Holy Scripture, the Fathers, the theologians, and reason itself teach on the question of vocation.

We shall keep in view especially these two points: 1. What kind of vocation or calling is necessary that one may properly and profitably embrace the religious state? 2. What obligations does such a vocation impose?

CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS VOCATION IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

A. SOME TEXTS THAT NEED EXPLANATION

1. Matt. xix, 11–12: *"All men take not this word* [concerning the practice of virginity], *but they to whom it is given. . . . He that can take, let him take it."*

In these words Our Lord seems to recommend continence only to those who have a special gift that is the privilege of a few.

But the meaning of the text is as follows:

"Take" (*capere*—χωρεῖν) means not only to understand or comprehend, but also to approve and to relish in such a manner as to embrace this state. (Beelen, Knabenbauer.)

This meaning is apparent from the context. For it is not of a speculative understanding, but of the practical approval shown by embracing this state that it can be said: "He that can take, let him take it."

When it is said, "Those only take it to whom it is given," it is evident that continence is a gift of

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God; but the number of those who receive this gift is not thereby indicated. All Catholic interpreters maintain that this gift has, in the divine plan, been in a wonderful manner prepared for many, and is denied to none bound by the obligation of celibacy. (See Knabenbauer on this text.) Nay more, some of the best interpreters think that God bestows this gift on all who pray for it. "These words *'Not all take it,'* " says Beelen, "do not mean that God gives this gift of grace to some and denies it to others. It is offered to all, and can be obtained by all who pray for it as they should."

This latter interpretation is more in accord with the teaching of the Fathers, as Cardinal Bellarmine has clearly shown (Controv., T. 2, Contr. 2, Bk. 2, Ch. 31). In his discussion of the subject Bellarmine also shows that Catholics must beware of understanding this text of St. Matthew in any other way, and thereby supporting the heretics who rail at clerical celibacy.

2. Matt. xix, 23: *"Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven."* (See also Mark x, 17–22.)

These words were spoken by Our Saviour after the rich young man had gone away sad after declining the invitation: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast . . . and come follow me." Shall we conclude from this that one who is specially called, risks his salvation if he does not heed the call?

Relying on the best interpreters, we find that such is not the meaning of the passage. "For," says Beelen, "it was not said of the young man in particular that he was risking his salvation; but his sadness gave occasion for a general pronouncement on the obstacles presented by riches." Knabenbauer confirms this view. He says: "From the fact that the young man was hindered, by his love of riches, from following the invitation of the Master, Jesus took occasion to show the danger of riches in general."

3. 1 Cor. vii, 7: *"For I would that all men were even as myself: but every one hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that."*—*Ibid.*, vii, 9: *"But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to be burnt."*

Here again it seems to be taught that continence is a special gift, without which it were better to marry. Let us first see what approved interpreters say of this passage, and then which of the interpretations they give is preferable.

What is the meaning of the word "gift"? Cornely says: "The Apostle uses this word alike for continence and for matrimony." Cornelius a Lapide is of the opinion that the passage either refers to the state (of matrimony or celibacy) itself—for while the state is the result of individual choice, yet it can be called a gift of God inasmuch as God is

the immediate or mediate cause of any good state in the Church, and from Him goes forth "all the guidance of secondary causes, and all providence";—or that it has reference to the grace proper to each state, —that grace which God bestows on all who choose a good state.

Bellarmine agrees with the first interpretation. He says: "The *gift* of God is that some choose virginity, and in like manner others choose Matrimony and live chastely therein."

The second opinion is favored by Beelen, who holds that the "gift" of God is the ability to serve God in the state of virginity or the state of Matrimony.

But all interpreters admit that the term "gift" is used for Matrimony as well as for continence, and that, therefore, nothing is meant which is proper to continence only. If, then, they deny the gift to some, they speak of the efficacious grace of continence, not the sufficient grace. Hence they still maintain that it lies in our power to live continently if we but use the help available for obtaining or preserving continence.

Regarding the rest of this text:—

"I would" (*volo*) is understood by Cornelius a Lapide and others to mean an imperfect act of the will: "I might wish" (*velim, vellem*). But some, for instance Cornely, interpret it as a sincere will,

a real desire, although convinced that many do not attain this gift. In a similar way we truly wish Christians perfect charity, or absolute purity of life, though it is evident that many will not attain to these virtues.

The term, "All men," says Cornelius a Lapide, is to be taken distributively, not collectively.

"But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry." According to many this "not containing themselves" means to be overcome by temptation, not merely disturbed by it. But Beelen thinks the Apostle means those who are harassed by temptations which far exceed their strength, so that sins can be foreseen.

This meaning may be proposed: But if they find very great difficulty in observing chastity, let them marry. But this saying of the Apostle must be limited to those who are still free to choose, and cannot be extended to those already bound by vow. These latter will obtain from God the necessary strength by prayer.

We maintain that in this text we must retain the usual meaning of the term "gift." Everywhere in the New Testament "gift" (*donum*, χάρισμα) signifies, in an unlimited way, the many and various gratuitous benefits bestowed by divine mercy. (See Rom. v, 15–16; 2 Cor. i, 11; 1 Pet. iv, 10; 1 Tim. iv, 14; 1 Cor. xii, 7.) Nowhere does the term "gift"

signify "state." Now we must not depart from the usual meaning of a word without an adequate cause. Moreover, if "gift" meant "state," there would be a choice between only two, Matrimony and celibacy, whereas the words "one after this manner, another after that" imply more than two states. Shall that state which is less perfect be considered a special gift of God equally with the more perfect state? Again, if Matrimony were a direct gift of God, could the Apostle say in all earnestness: "I would that all men were even as myself"? Would not such a wish be contrary to the divine will?

Therefore the sense of this passage is not: Every man has his proper gift from God in such a way that God has predestined a particular state for each. The words of St. Paul are rather to be understood thus: I desire that all should live a life of virginity. This desire is not changed or restricted by the words, "everyone hath his proper gift." They merely explain why it is that many do not heed that advice. That is to say, there is a varying dispensation of grace: some are moved more effectually than others, and thus it happens that in various persons there are varying degrees of sanctity, of virtue, of willingness to follow the counsels of Christ.

Incidentally, to those who cannot practice continence (be it because of less grace conferred by God or of a lack of inclination on the part of the individ-

ual) the Apostle gives the advice rather to marry than to sin or to endeavor to bear a yoke to which their strength is unequal. In the same way the Apostle could have said: "I would that all attain a high degree of sanctity; but every one hath his proper gift from God."

4. 1 Cor. vii, 17, 20: *"As God hath called every one, so let him walk.—Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called."* From this again we might deduce that there is a special call of God to each individual state. But let us see.

The calling in this instance concerns faith alone. The circumstances under which one is called to the faith are, by a kind of metonymy, designated as the calling. "As God hath called every one, so let him walk," means: In whatever honorable state of life anyone was when God called him to the faith, in that state let him walk; that is to say, let him make no change in his state. "Let every man abide," etc. means: Let every man remain in that state of life in which he was when he was called to embrace the faith.

This explanation is demanded by the context. For in verses 18, 21, and 22, St. Paul speaks of one who is "called being circumcised . . . in uncircumcision . . . being a bondman . . . being free," etc., but never of one being "called *to* circumcision, *to* freedom," etc. It would have been strange indeed

had he said that one is called to circumcision, which, St. Paul himself says, "is nothing" (verse 19), or that Christians who are guilty of sins have so followed the divine call that they are all in the state which God especially appointed for them.

The interpreters agree with this explanation. Beelen says: "'*called*' means 'made a Christian.'" According to Cornely the meaning of this passage is that by conversion to the faith no man is obliged to leave that state in which he lived in conformity with God's will.

He well says: "in conformity with God's will"; for though the Apostle does not declare that there is a direct divine call to each state, he does not deny that men are ever guided by Providence and led to a good state, although, if they coöperated with the greater grace, they might attain an even better state. As regards *sufficient* grace, many modes of life are offered by Divine Providence, and though all are good, some are better than others. As regards *efficacious* grace, the object of Divine Providence and the gift of God is the *good* mode of life that one is living. This procedure of Divine Providence is indirectly indicated by the words of verse 17: "As the Lord hath distributed to every one."

5. Hebrews v, 4: "*Neither does any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was.*"

From this text some have concluded that no man

may rightly embrace the religious state unless he is conscious of a special call.

But the error of this deduction is apparent. "The honor" (*honor, ἡ τιμή*) here in question is the high-priesthood. (See Huyghe, Epistle to the Hebrews.) There is a difference between the religious state and the dignity of the priesthood. Some saints in their humility had almost to be forced into the priesthood; but to the religious state they "hastened under press of sail." (See Segneri, *Institutio Parochi, Ch. III,* § 2).

The phrase, "Neither doth any man take," means: Neither doth any man make himself a priest by his own hands. There is question here of the external usurpation or the legitimate granting of the dignity. Therefore the Roman Catechism says (Part II, Ch. 7, § 3): "They are said to be called by God who are called by the rightful ministers of the Church."

6. Proverbs i, 23 sqq.: *"Behold I will utter my spirit to you . . . because I called and you refused. . . . You have despised all my counsel . . . I also will laugh in your destruction. . . ."*

This text has been adduced as a proof that one is in duty bound to follow the divine call. But it is evident from the context that the threats in this passage were hurled at the wicked who despised the warnings of Divine Wisdom and chose sin. Hence we may pass over this text without further comment.

B. CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING VOCATION FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE

Lest too little importance be given certain passages, we must bear in mind that whatever is said of any one of the evangelical counsels, applies to all of them. The underlying principles are the same. Since many of the passages refer directly to chastity, we speak of this counsel, which might seem very difficult and to many even impossible. We find that we can safely draw the following conclusions from Holy Scripture:

I. *Negative Conclusions:*

1. There is no evidence of a divine plan whereby God assigns to each man, antecedently to the use of free will, a particular state, so that he who embraces another state will find himself, so to speak, in a state not his own.

2. There is no condemnation of those who decline the special invitation extended by God.

II. *Positive Conclusions:*

1. There is a general counsel to practice continence, to give up all things, to follow Christ more perfectly;—and this counsel is given to all. "He that can take, let him take it" (Matt. xix, 12); "Everyone that has left house or brethren," etc. (Matt. xix, 29); "I would that all men were even as myself" (1 Cor. vii, 7).

2. In most cases a man is free to choose between the ordinary and the more perfect state, so that, no matter which mode of life he chooses, he cannot be accused of perfidy. We see this from the words of the Apostle, who (1 Cor. vii, 38) delivers this general dictum: "He does well who gives his daughter in marriage, but he does better who gives her not."

3. Some are favored by a very special invitation. Thus Our Lord said to the disciple who had asked leave to bury his father: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matt. viii, 22). To the rich young man He says: "If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all thou hast, . . . and come follow me" (Matt. xix, 21).

4. The *efficacious* grace of perfect chastity is not given to all. "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given. . . . He that can take, let him take it" (Matt. xix, 11, 12). "But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry" (1 Cor. vii, 9).

In a similar way Holy Scripture says that the gift of faith is not given to all; "For all men have not faith" (2 Thess, iii, 2). (See Bellarmine, T. 2, Controv. 2, Bk. 2, Concerning Monks, Ch. 31, § 13, etc.)

5. In choosing a state of life, man is not deserted by Divine Providence. Any good state which one chooses may be considered acceptable to God.

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Therefore, the Apostle thus sums up the various states: "As the Lord has distributed to every one" (1 Cor. vii, 17).

6. The gift of perpetual continence seems to be within reach of all who embrace perfect chastity for the service of God. In Matt. xix, 12, according to Knabenbauer, Our Lord explains who they are to whom this gift is given from heaven. Besides those who are by necessity constrained to lead such a life, he mentions a third kind of "eunuchs" (those who are such spiritually), *i. e.,* who are eunuchs "for the kingdom of Heaven."

7. Those who are in too great danger of incontinence, are advised to marry: "But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry" (1 Cor. vii, 9); "I will therefore that the younger [widows] should marry" (1 Tim. v, 14).

CHAPTER II

RELIGIOUS VOCATION ACCORDING TO THE FATHERS

The teaching of the Fathers on religious vocation may be summed up in the following four propositions:

1. The path of the evangelical counsels is in itself open to all and may be urged upon all.

2. Once the intention of choosing the more perfect way has been formed, its execution must not be delayed too long.

3. Ordinarily there is no obligation to choose the more perfect mode of life.

4. By way of exception, those who seem somewhat weak in their purpose or too much inclined to incontinence, are not to be advised to enter the religious state.

As regards the clearness of their teaching, the Fathers teach more distinctly and emphatically the unlimited calling and the freedom from the necessity of following such a call, and urge the immediate execution of the intention when formed, but lay

less emphasis on the exception (that is, the fourth point above). Let us consider their statements.

1. *The path of the evangelical counsels is in itself open to all and may be urged upon all.*

Many of the Fathers maintain this proposition indirectly when they repeatedly and expressly urge Christians to follow the religious life. Why the advice to all, if it were not generally applicable? The most noteworthy patristic exhortations are those that take the form of complete treatises or discourses. Thus St. Chrysostom, "On Virginity"; St. Ambrose, "Concerning Virgins," "Concerning Widows," "On Virginity," "On the Exhortation to Virginity"; St. Augustine, "On the Conjugal State," "On Holy Virginity."

(a) *The Greek Fathers:*

St. Basil (*Epist.* 173): "It is the privilege of everyone to embrace the evangelical mode of life."

St. Gregory Nazianzen (*Disc.* 37, on Matt. xix, 11): "All men take not this word, but they to whom it is given. When it is said *to whom it is given,* you must add that it is given to those who wish it and approve of it."

St. John Chrysostom (on the same text): "It is given to them who freely choose it (τοῖς βουλομένοις). He said it thus to show that we have need of help from on high. This help is ready for all of us who wish to come forth victorious from this

struggle." The same Doctor clearly shows, in his treatise "On Virginity" (Ch. 36), that continence is not one of the gifts beyond our power; and he urges the counsel of St. Paul: "I would that all men were even as myself, continent."

(b) *The Latin Fathers:*

St. Ambrose *(De Viduis,* 13*)*: "There are eunuchs who have made themselves such for the kingdom of Heaven; while this is not commanded to all, yet all are invited."

St. Jerome (*Comm. in Matt.* xix, 11): "Let no one suppose that by this passage either fate or chance is meant;—that those are virgins whom God has made so, or those who came to be such by chance. On the contrary, it has been given to those who asked it, to those who wished it, to those who strove to obtain it. For every one that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him who knocketh it shall be opened."

In his book "Against Vigilantius" the same Saint says: "Would that all were what the few are."

St. Augustine (*De Bono Conjug.*, 10): "But I know some who may complain: If all men wished to refrain from all cohabitation, how would the human race survive? Would that all might wish this, but 'in charity, from a pure heart, and an unfeigned faith' (1 Tim. i, 5). The city of God would be filled the sooner, and the end of time hastened. For what else does the Apostle advise?"

St. Bernard (*Book of Precepts and Dispensations,* Ch. 1): "The rule of St. Benedict is proposed to all, but imposed upon none. It is beneficial to those who devoutly adopt and observe it; but it is not the cause of harm to those who do not adopt it."

2. *Once the intention of choosing the more perfect way has been formed, its execution must not be delayed too long.*

(a) *The Greek Fathers:*

Their statements refer to the words of Christ when He allowed no delay to the two whom He had advised to follow Him: "No one putting his hand to the plow," etc.—"Let the dead bury their dead" (Matt. viii, 21 and Luke ix, 59 and 62).

St. Cyril of Alexandria: "He looks back because he seeks a delay to confer with his relatives."

St. Basil (*Monastic Constitutions,* 20). "Both indeed seemed to ask something very just and reasonable; but the Saviour does not approve, and does not allow the candidates for the Kingdom of Heaven to be separated from Him for even a moment."

St. John Chrysostom (27th Homily on St. Matthew): "Jesus forbade them this, in order that He might show us that there is nothing so necessary for us as the things of Heaven, and that we must attend to them with diligence, not delaying in the

least, even though there seem to be urgent matters that draw us elsewhere."

(b) *The Latin Fathers:*

St. Jerome (*Epist. ad Paulinum*): "Hasten, I pray thee, and cut rather than loosen the rope that holds the boat to the shore."

St. Gregory the Great *(Hom. Pentecost.)*: "Oh, how skilful is the Spirit! There is no delay in learning what He wills. As soon as He touches the mind, He teaches; to have but touched is to have taught. For He suddenly moves the human soul to enlighten it; at once He does not allow the soul to remain what it was; at once He displays it as that which it was not before."

St. Bernard (§ 27 of the "Declamationes" of Abbot Geoffrey, compiled from the Sermons of St. Bernard): "When you cannot doubt the voice of God, what need of hesitation? The messenger of great counsel calls;—what need is there of other counsels?"

3. *Ordinarily there is no obligation to choose the more perfect mode of life.*

(a) *The Greek Fathers:*

St. Basil (*De Virgin.*, § 55 sq.): "The Lord did not will that virginity be the object of a command, but that it be the ornament of a soul eager for virtue, achieving of its own free choice that which

is superior to a command, and above nature. All binding commands are eliminated, and there is introduced only a counsel that does not oblige: the counsel that it behooves one (who is not bound by a command, but who is elevated by his own free power) to do violence to nature. . . ."

St. John Chrysostom *(De Virgin., 9)*, speaking to those for whom the safeguard of Matrimony is not necessary, admonishes them "like myself, not to contract marriage, though I do not forbid Matrimony. There is between the two the great difference that lies between necessity and free choice. He who counsels, leaves his hearers free to follow that counsel; he who forbids, takes away from him the faculty of free choice. When I counsel virginity, I do not condemn Matrimony; nor do I find fault with him who will not be persuaded to embrace virginity." The same Saint (*De Paenit.*, Hom. 6, § 3) represents God as saying: "It is in your power; be master of your resolve. I do not force, I do not bind. But I will crown him who happily does so, though I will not punish him who does it not." Again (*Comm. in Matt.* xix, 21), concerning the young man who had a very special calling, he says: "The Lord left all to his free will."

St. Gregory Nazianzen (*In Julian., Orat.* i, § 99) says: "Among our laws some impose the necessity of obedience and cannot be neglected with impunity;

others do not bind, but are a matter of choice and free will, and hence have this advantage that those who keep them are loaded with honor and rewards, while those who do not, need fear no condemnation."

(b) *The Latin Fathers:*

St. Cyprian (*De Habitu Virg.*, 23): "The Lord does not command this, but counsels it; He does not impose the burden of necessity, since the free choice of the will remains; but when He says that there are many mansions in His Father's house, He displays the chambers of a better habitation."

St. Jerome (*Contra Jovinian.*, i): "Where counsel is given, there is the desire of the giver; where a command is given, the compulsion of the subject. He does not say: whether you will or no, you must drink, you must run; but he who desires, and can run, and can bear, he will be victorious, he will be filled."

St. Ambrose (*De Viduis*, 12): "Behold the difference between command and counsel, when you remember him who had been commanded in the Gospel not to kill, . . . for the command is there where there is penalty for the sin. But when he has mentioned that he has fulfilled the commandments of the Law, then he receives the advice to sell all and follow the Lord. These things are not commanded, but advised. For there is a twofold form of injunction: one a strict command, the other a matter of choice. Thus in one case the Lord says:

Thou shalt not kill,—here He commands; in the other: *If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast.* Hence this man is not commanded, when the choice is left to him."

There are other passages of like nature in the same and the preceding chapter of this treatise of St. Ambrose.

St. Augustine (*De S. Virgin.,* 30): *"Thou shalt not marry* cannot be said in the same sense as: *Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal.* The latter are commands, the former is a suggestion. If the suggestion is followed, they are praised; if the commands are not observed, they are condemned. In the latter the Lord commands a duty; in the former, for whatever you do over and above, He will reward you at His return."

Some Objections Answered

To this clear proof, which ordinarily excludes all obligation, even of an indirect kind, even for those who are specially called, like the young man in the Gospel, there are sometimes opposed a few passages which we will now discuss.

(a) The most common objection rests on a passage from St. Gregory the Great's Epistle to the Emperor Maurice (Bk. 3, Ep. 65), in which the Saint denounces a law which prohibited soldiers from becoming religious. The Saint gives as a

reason for his protest: "There are many who absolutely cannot be saved unless they give up everything."

The explanation of this statement is very simple. Who does not know that the moral dangers to soldiers are very numerous? It can scarce be doubted that many of them live in constant occasion of sin. Consequently, unless there is a way in which they can avoid this occasion, their salvation is very much endangered. If you say the same thing of the secular state in general, we do not contradict; but in no way can you deduce that the cause of such a disaster can be attributed to a lack of grace,—grace denied by God because of failure to follow a vocation. Does not the same holy Doctor say, just before the above-mentioned statement: "There are many who can lead a religious life even in secular garb"?

(b) What shall we say of the words of St. Bernard (quoted by St. Alphonsus, *Theol. Mor.*, Bk. V, § 78): "There is danger to chastity in enjoyments, danger to humility in riches, danger to piety in business, danger to truth in much speaking, danger to charity in a wicked world; fly from the midst of Babylon and save your souls"?

This exhortation, it seems to us, contrasts in a striking manner the dangers of the world and the security of the monastery. But it indicates neither an obligation of entering religion nor the denial of

grace to those who, heedless of the call, remain in the world.

(c) It is customary to adduce two letters (107 and 108) of St. Bernard, the one addressed to Thomas of Beverley and the other to Thomas of St. Omer, in which the Saint urges the obligation of entering the religious state.

But both these men were bound by a vow to enter the monastery, and therefore what was said to them cannot be applied to one who has simply been called by God. Thomas of Beverley is addressed by St. Bernard in this manner: "We desire your presence, we seek what is desired, nay, we demand what was promised. . . . Remembering your promise, deny us your presence no longer." Thomas of St. Omer is upbraided thus: "I have been summoned as witness to a vow, and not as one who enforces it. . . . You have set a limit beyond which you may not pass. . . . You have broken your word, not to man, but to God."

4. *Those who seem somewhat weak in their purpose, or too much inclined to incontinence, are not to be advised to enter the religious state.*

(a) *The Greek Fathers:*

St. Basil (*Ascetical Sermon and Exhortation on the Renunciation of the World,* § 1), after encouraging a man to enter the religious state, says: "However, I advise him not to act rashly . . .

Thus it happens that he easily returns whence he came, and so becomes an object of ridicule and derision to all."

St. John Chrysostom (*De Virgin.*, 9): "Therefore, far from considering Matrimony a dishonorable thing, I praise it highly. For to those who wish to use it rightly, it is a safeguard of continence, not allowing nature to run wild." He expresses the same opinion in ch. 19, where he says that Matrimony was instituted preëminently to curb the ardor of nature.

(b) *The Latin Fathers:*

St. Augustine (*De Bono Conjugali*, 10): "It seems to me that only those should marry who cannot be continent, according to the saying of the Apostle: 'But if they do not contain themselves let them marry; for it is better to marry than to be burnt.'"

St. Jerome (*Epist. ad Ageruchiam, Ep.* 123): "The Apostle [when he says: 'I will that the younger marry'] wishes a second marriage, preferring a second marriage to fornication, by way of permission only, not as a command." Again, commenting on Matt. xix, 12, he says: "Let each one consider his strength, whether he can fulfil the precepts of virginity and chastity; for chastity is in itself attractive and inviting; but one's strength must be considered, so that he who can may take it."

CHAPTER III

RELIGIOUS VOCATION ACCORDING TO THE THEOLOGIANS

A. THE TEACHING OF THE PRINCIPAL DOCTORS OF THE SCHOLASTIC PERIOD

1. *St. Thomas Aquinas*

This matter is treated by St. Thomas in the *Summa Theol.,* Ia IIae, qu. 108, art. 4; IIa IIae qu. 189; and especially in *Opusculum* 17, entitled: "Against the Pernicious Teaching of Those who Hinder Men from Entering the Religious State." The principal points of doctrine may be summed up thus:

The intention to enter the religious life, whether it arises from the general invitation of the Scriptures or springs from an interior impulse, is to be taken as something salutary and preferable. This intention is safely carried out, whether one be practiced in the observance of the commandments or not (qu. 189, art. 10; *Opusc.* 17, ch. 2–7, 9, 10).

When there seems to be a special impediment, consideration is necessary. But one must not ex-

tend this consideration over too long a period (qu. 189, art. 10). For it evidently will happen that some, who are little inclined to the religious state, are not to be advised to follow the evangelical counsels (Ia IIae, qu. 108, art. 4, ad 1). St. Thomas also wishes that those concerned in due season ponder the particular order or rule it were best for them to follow. He urges the speedy execution of such an intention and praises the vow by which one binds himself to enter the religious state (*Opusc.* 17, ch. 9, 11–13).

But St. Thomas nowhere threatens eternal ruin or the deprivation of sufficient grace to him who, though he be fit for it, neglects the more desirable state. He could not write otherwise, for he is the theologian who says that command differs from counsel in this "that a command implies obligation, whereas a counsel is left to the option of the one to whom it is given"; and he adds that it is in accord with the evangelical law of liberty that, besides and above the commands, there should be counsels, the following of which is not necessary for salvation. (See Ia IIae, qu. 108, art. 4.)

2. *Suarez*

In his treatise "On the Religious State" (Tr. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 4, 8), Suarez maintains that everyone is capable of Christian perfection and consequently may enter the religious state. He quotes Richard

of St. Victor as saying: "Everyone is to consider the religious state as suitable to himself unless the contrary is evident by certain discovery or experience." (See ch. 4, § 1 and ch. 8, § 2.) But in view of the gravity of the matter he desires serious reflection, though not extended for too long a time, in which that state is considered in relation to one's strength and the intrinsic and extrinsic conditions of a person. He warns that we must not look too much to our own strength, but rather to the power given by the divine assistance (ch. 8, § 2).

Suarez considers worthy of praise anyone who leads another to follow the counsels of Christ. Yet he says this must be done prudently, especially since a resolve founded on the persuasion of another may be very inconstant (ch. 8, § 9).

He distinguishes two kinds of vocation or calling: the one extraordinary, where, antecedently to all deliberation, the person is inclined to the religious state; the other where, without such inclination, the individual begins to reflect and, after considering the dangers of the world on the one hand and the advantages of the religious life on the other, concludes that the latter is more suitable for him. Regarding the former kind of vocation, he does not hesitate to ascribe to the Holy Ghost the desire for this state—that is, ordinarily, unless it seems open to suspicion from some other source,

as, for instance, the craving for temporal advantage (ch. 8, §§ 4 sq.).

Considering the "signs" of the religious vocation, as we say to-day, Suarez demands the following: (a) The pure intention of serving God. Something temporal or human, however, may give rise to this intention. (b) A firm reliance on the divine assistance, "which each one can justly claim." In this he agrees with Cajetan. Suarez adds that the entry into religion should be made "freely and of one's own accord" (ch. 8, §§ 6–8).

Of the obligation of following the call to religion, Suarez says: Those sin who give contrary advice to one whom they know to be called, "but the Holy Ghost Himself, since he does not impose the obligation consequent upon a command, allows the one who is called to use his right at his own free choice."

3. *Bellarmine*

Cardinal Bellarmine says that continence is a gift that is within the power of man and compares it to the gift of faith (Controv., T. 2, Contr. 2, Bk. 2, ch. 31, §§ 4, 12, 20). In ch. 9, §§ 28, 45 and 47, he says that the evangelical counsels were given to all.

Even those who have received the advice to marry have the privilege of aspiring to higher things (ch. 30, §§ 2, 26–28).

The obligation of following the counsels is denied by him (ch. 12). In ch. 31, § 11 he says: "The words of 1 Cor. vii, 36: 'Let him do what he will,' leave man free to choose marriage or celibacy."

4. *Lessius*

In his *Opusculum:* "On the Choice of a State of Life" Lessius says: "The counsel of Christ refers to each and every one who has the power to follow it. No one is excluded. It was said to all: 'He who can take, let him take it,' that is, I force no one, I invite all; whoever has the courage to take it, let him not fail to do so" (§ 28).

He adds that there is no need of much deliberation when there is no impediment; there should be no doubt that the intention to enter religion comes from God if it is made solely with the spiritual good in view (§§ 28, 57, 59, 69, 70). But he desires that there be some reflection on the state to be entered upon, and gives a threefold method for such reflection (§§ 71–77).

Vocation he defines as follows: "By vocation I understand that affection, that inward force, which makes a man feel impelled to enter the religious state, or some other state" (§ 56). He demands that the primary purpose of the one who enters be supernatural. But he is careful to remind us that a temporal motive can be changed into a spiritual

one, and that it is no obstacle if the secondary cause of a man's entrance, which either furnishes the occasion or gives the impetus, be temporal (§§ 63–68).

He says that the vow to enter religion is in itself good (§§ 109–111). Special rules for the choice of a definite order are given in § 53.

Lessius further says that it is often better not to induce another directly to enter religion, especially the particular order to which one belongs (§§ 55, 112).

Concerning the obligation of following the call to religion he says: (a) He commits a sin who is conscious, "as often happens," that he will be deserted by God unless he follows the divine call, and nevertheless refuses to heed the call; (b) The neglect of the call, even for those who *per se* do not sin by their neglect, is often the cause of a bad life and of eternal damnation, because they give God a just cause for conferring less grace, since they neglect so great a gift (§ 95). He adds that God punishes this neglect also in other ways in this life (§ 101).

5. *Passerini*

Fr. Passerini, O. P., in his treatise "On the States of Men" (on qu. 189, art. 10) says that ordinarily there is little need of deliberation as to entering the

religious state, but that it sometimes becomes necessary by reason of the qualifications or circumstances of the individual (§ 6).

In regard to the *signs of vocation,* he demands the greatest sincerity of purpose (although the occasion of the purpose may be temporal), and a firm trust in God (§§ 5, 7, 8). The desire and the intention of entering religion is to be considered as coming from the Holy Ghost if the one who has them, after mature deliberation, is not conscious of any impediment (§ 14).

He says absolutely nothing of any disaster befalling one who does not enter religion though he be called.

6. *Cornelius a Lapide*

In his Commentary, on 1 Cor. ch. vii, this eminent exegete says that all the faithful have the *remote* power of continence, which can be made *proximate* by prayer. This, he adds, is the common opinion of the Fathers. Therefore, he says, this gift must be compared to the gift of perseverance, not to gratuitous gifts. (On Verse 25.)

On vocation he says: God sometimes gives an individual the inclination toward celibacy or toward Matrimony; but quite often He does not influence man one way or the other. (On Verse 7.) He thinks those who easily allow themselves to be diverted by nature or habit should be advised to

marry. (On vs. 25.) He denies that there is an obligation to follow the call to religion and that he who does not enter religion, sins. God gives to each, he says, the grace proper to the state which he has selected, and more grace is given if the state is changed for a better. (On vvs. 7 and 37.)

B. OPINIONS OF MORE RECENT AUTHORS

1. *St. Alphonsus Liguori*

See his Moral Theology, Bk. V, § 78, and the *"Opuscula"* collected and translated into French by R. P. Dujardin, C.SS.R. (Complete Works: Ascetic Works, Vol. III, Tournay, 1881, 5th edition.)

St. Alphonsus starts from the premise that God determines a particular state for every man, according to the text: "Everyone hath his proper gift from God" (1 Cor. vii, 7). He cites Cornelius a Lapide, whose opinion, however, is quite the contrary. (*Opusc.* "On the Choice of a State of Life," p. 404; also note; pp. 498, 505, 444.)

St. Alphonsus says the grace of religious vocation is extremely rare (pp. 452–443), but at the same time warns those who wish to enter upon this state not to deliberate too long. He approves of the teaching of St. Thomas (pp. 410 sqq.)

The signs of a true vocation, says St. Alphonsus, are present in him who is free from all positive impediments, is actuated by the right purpose, and is

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received by the superior of an order (p. 412, **note**).

The obligation of following the call is very strongly insisted on by this holy Doctor (p. 406 sqq.). He says that our salvation depends largely upon the choice of a state of life, and that this choice must be made not at will, but in accord with the divine approval (p. 404). Those who are called are obliged to enter religion; if they fail to do this, it will be difficult to them to be saved (*Theol. Mor.*, § 78). In this St. Alphonsus follows Lessius and seems to be influenced by the opinions of certain rigorists, especially Habert.

2. *Other Recent Authors*

We cannot deny that many writers of our time who have otherwise done well in theology, do not treat this matter with the necessary care and precision, nay, often contradict themselves. Perhaps this contradiction arises from the fact that they make a laudable effort to combine the teaching of St. Thomas with that of St. Alphonsus, whereas to our way of thinking the two do not agree on every point. However this may be, the opinions held by many to-day can be reduced to the following propositions:

Every man is called to a certain state of life, towards which he is guided by Divine Providence in such a way that, unless he chooses it, he remains in a state not his own all through life. None insists

more strongly on this than Fr. Gautrelet, S.J., who says that this is a necessary rule of Divine Wisdom and Providence. (See his *Treatise on the Religious State,* Vol. I, pp. 216, 217 sqq., 1885 edition.) Much the same thing is held by Fr. I. Coppin, C.SS.R., in his book, *Vocation to the Married State, to Celibacy, to the Religious Life* (Part I, Ch. 4).

These writers cannot see in the general invitation of Christ to follow His counsels any mark of the divine approval except for those who are endowed with a special grace, "that they may by this grace understand that the counsels are better for them, and may love the counsels they are to follow," as Scavini says (*Theol. Mor.,* 14th edit., Vol. I, § 472). Those who are truly called are described as "some who are preferred to others." Thus Gury (II, § 148), followed by Konings (*Theol. Mor.,* 3rd edit., Vol. I, § 1151). St. Alphonsus himself says that the grace of vocation is very rare (*Opusc.* "On the Choice of a State of Life," pp. 452–453).

Without this vocation, they say, it would be wrong to enter the religious state. Only those may enter that state "who are led to it by the internal calling and enlightenment that comes from God," says Aertnys (*Theol. Mor.,* I, Bk. V, Ch. 2, § 3). Bucceroni holds that those sin who enter religion though they know they are not called (*Theol. Mor., De Relig.,* § 8). P. Marc says this only of the

priesthood (*Inst. Mor.,* II, 2142). While he reckons among the signs of vocation a "constant inclination" towards that state, he yet says that only those sin grievously who enter the priesthood "without vocation, that is, without fitness . . . or without the right intention." Gury, followed by Konings, says that those who, knowing clearly that they have no vocation, nevertheless enter upon this state of life, sin, unless "they have the purpose of fulfilling the duties of the state upon which they have entered." This latter qualification, it seems to us, weakens his teaching very much. For if the formal cause of the sin is found in the absence of the divine call, this cannot be supplied by the human will. Indeed, if you argue further that those who have not the call will be incapable of fulfilling the duties of that state, can that impotence be removed by the human will?

If we accept the opinions of these theologians, the divine call scarcely differs from a command. For, while admitting that no obligation arises from the Evangelical Counsels, in the final analysis the choice is relegated to a purely speculative consideration of the matter. Indeed, in practice, those who do not follow the call commit *per se* a venial sin. This assertion, made with some hesitation by St. Alphonsus (*Theol. Mor.,* V, § 78), is boldly maintained by others, for instance, C. d'Annibale (*Summula,* III, 215).

Thus there is actually no choice left to anyone, since it is impossible to enter the religious state if one is not called to it, or to refuse to enter if he is called, without committing sin. This conclusion is distinctly set forth by Scavini, who says: "Those who are not called cannot enter the religious state; . . . those who are called must enter it; or what would be the use of the call?" (I, § 473, 14th edit.)

The marks of a divine vocation are said by these writers to be fitness for the religious state and a kind of inclination or tendency called "attraction." Just what this attraction consists in, is not made clear. Some say that it is a certain intimate message by which God reveals to the soul that it is His will that a certain state be chosen in preference to another. Yet at the same time they grant that the inclination may proceed from reflection and reasoning; thus, for example, Gautrelet, who describes this inclination at great length. But if it is sufficient that there be a moving of the will which corresponds exactly to the incentives, how does this "attraction" differ from a real desire? Why not simply say that one must have a real desire to enter the religious state?

Some theologians now withdraw from this position and follow the earlier theologians. Piat (*Lectures on the Law of Regulars,* pp. 32 sq.), considers the general call given to all a true vocation,

and restricts the severe teaching on the necessity of following the call to the very special call which some men receive.

The teaching on the necessity of following the call is mitigated by Bucceroni, who (§ 12) does not lay down one rule for all, but says that the circumstances in each case must be considered. Lehmkuhl goes even farther when (§ 510) he denies that he who fails to follow the calling, sins *per se,* though he admits that, *per accidens,* there may be a question of sin.

As to the signs of the religious vocation, many now require nothing more than fitness and the right intention. Thus Lehmkuhl (Vol. I, §§ 507 sq.).

Finally, there are some who openly return to the teaching of the earlier theologians. Thus Fr. Buthier, M.S., in his *Opusculum* on "The States of Life of the Christian, and Vocation," and Fr. Bouvier, S.J., in his paper "Vocation according to the Masters of Theology," in *Le Recrutement Sacerdotale,* June 15, 1901.

We shall endeavor to reëstablish this original teaching, which, it seems to us, is not only based on S. Scripture and the Fathers, but also commends itself because of its clearness and simplicity. Therefore, in the next chapter we shall give what we think are the true principles concerning religious vocation, together with some conclusions as to the prudent use to which these principles may be put.

CHAPTER IV

THE CORRECT EXPLANATION OF RELIGIOUS VOCATION

A. PRINCIPLES

1. *To whom are the Evangelical Counsels given?*

In itself the way of the Evangelical Counsels is offered to every faithful Christian as a better and more salutary mode of life, to be accepted at the will of each. We must recall here the approved theological distinction between the *antecedent* and *consequent* will of God. God's will is called antecedent or consequent in so far as it logically precedes or follows His fore-knowledge of how man will use his free will and the grace which God gives him. God's antecedent will is, therefore, logically anterior to the knowledge of the free actions of men. Now in regard to the Evangelical Counsels we maintain that it is the *antecedent* will of God so to enlighten the mind and move the will of every man that if he will coöperate with divine grace and pray sufficiently, he will be enabled to apply the Counsels to his life efficaciously and with profit.

But we deny that God wills to put man under the obligation of choosing this or that mode of life. Failure to enter upon the path of the Evangelical Counsels, therefore, is not a sin, nor does it cause God to deprive a man of sufficient grace.

That the path of the Evangelical Counsels is in itself open to all men is evident from the recommendation of these Counsels given in the Gospel, and from the words of the Fathers and the interpreters of Scripture, as we have seen in Chapters I and II. We may add this argument of Suarez: "In general every man is capable of that Christian perfection to which the religious state leads; hence, generally speaking, the Counsels of perfection are given to all" (*On the Religious State,* Tr. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 4, § 1).

Our position is confirmed by the practice of the Church. Unless that state of life were *per se* accessible and useful to all, the Church could not tolerate the custom, which was long in use in the Latin Church, of dedicating to God children who were not yet born. (See Vermeersch, *De Religiosis,* I, §§ 127 and 140.)

That the following of the counsels is not, however, obligatory, is proved from the testimony of S. Scripture and of the Fathers, and confirmed by the authority of the most distinguished theologians, who, with the sole exception of Lessius, for a long time said absolutely nothing about any danger in-

curred by those who decline this invitation. If such danger existed, how could the Apostle say (in 1 Cor., vii) that they who marry, or give their daughter in marriage, do *well,* but would do *better* if they preserved their virginity? Is he not called by God whom the Apostle praises for doing *well?* Or does he who does *well* fail to honor God duly or despise a virtual command, and by his contempt open the gate to eternal ruin?

The reason for this freedom of choice is evident. God, who has the right to command, left men the choice of some good deeds, to which he spurs them on, not by threats, but by the incentive of promised reward and the still nobler incentive of love. It is evident that the fact of God's allowing a free choice contributes much to His greater honor. Therefore St. Ambrose (*De Viduis,* 12), and after him St. Thomas (*Summa Theol.,* Ia IIae, qu. 108, art. 4), aver that it is owing to the more perfect law of the Gospel, which is the law of liberty, that there be counsels in addition to strict commands.

St. Ambrose writes: "Therefore, what is good is not to be avoided; what is better, is left to our choice. Hence it is not imposed, but proposed. . . . A command is given to subjects, a counsel to friends. Where there is a command, there is the law; where there is a counsel, there is grace. Therefore, the law was given to the Jews, but the

grace was reserved for the elect. The law, to recall to the observance of the law of nature, by the fear of punishment, those who were deliberately transgressing the limits of nature; but grace, to lead the elect by the pursuit of goodness and by the promise of reward."

St. Thomas says: "It is proper that in the New Law, which is the law of liberty, counsels are added to the commandments; not so in the Old Law, which was the law of bondage."

But is he who chooses the less perfect state not guilty of contempt towards God who calls, and does he not incur the wrath that follows contempt? We cannot put on a par mortal sins and venial sins or imperfections, and in a similar manner the refusal of the grace inviting us to better things which are not absolutely necessary must be distinguished from the refusal of the grace by which we perform necessary things that are commanded. In the latter case we are guilty of contempt and insult; in the former we merely prefer a lesser to a major grace. We have already indicated that when a certain state is preferred by some individual, it is not a question of electing a state of life which is not his own, but of following a secondary call to any good state.

In the stricter opinion is implied the false premise that God has designated a particular state for each human being, so that the selection of another state can scarcely be pleasing to Him. Habert goes so far as

to say that any state but the one thus predetermined for each man is positively displeasing to God. These are his words: "He who enters though not called, commits a grievous wrong against the supreme authority of God. . . . Without a vocation the office of the priesthood, though good in itself, is administered in opposition to God,—contrary to His will. . . . It is far more dangerous to make a mistake concerning vocation than concerning any single command of the law" (Habert, *Dogmatic and Moral Theology,* On the Sacrament of Orders, Part iii, Ch. 1, § 2). We have here an extraordinary example of confusing interior and exterior vocation,—of the will of one who invites and of one who commands or forbids.

We do not admit this principle or premise, that, God has designated a particular state for each individual human being. On the contrary, as we saw from Cornelius a Lapide and the Fathers, any honest state can be called a "gift of God," even if it is chosen by one who has been invited to a state of higher perfection.

Nor can it be objected, with Gautrelet, that we are dealing here with a necessity of Divine Providence. God is more worthy of admiration because He leads men to attain their end in many ways that are freely chosen, than He would be if He were limited to one method only. Moreover, unless you wish to deny all real choice among several

good actions, you must grant that we must explain the workings of Divine Providence in such a way that it proposes to us several alternatives which are all good, and all acceptable in so far as they are good, but among which some are more acceptable, inasmuch as they are better. Note that it is not quite proper to say that the ordinary state, if chosen by one who seems to be called to a more perfect state, is chosen as one "less good." This would indicate something faulty or bad, whereas that state must be considered as something *really good.* We have the same thing constantly in the choice of good works, of which some are *better* than others, but all are *good.*

It is proper, therefore, that those who are invited should not be hindered in their free choice by threats. Otherwise the choice left to us by God becomes fictitious or counterfeit. How could that be called a counsel which imposes a virtual command?

This teaching is the more to be retained since by it we are distinguished from the heretics who deny that there are real counsels, and regard everything that Christ said as a command. (See Vermeersch, *De Religiosis,* Vol. I, § 13.)

2. Exceptional Cases

By way of exception, there are some who are in duty bound to embrace the religious life, while to

others that state is morally impossible or not to be advised.

The moral necessity of entering religion may arise from a vow or exist in consequence of a divine law, either natural or positive. For God, the supreme Lord of human nature, certainly can command some particular person to do a thing which is ordinarily only advised, and consequently, if His will is thus revealed to someone, that person is bound by a positive divine command. Moreover, if someone is really convinced that he cannot save his soul if he remains in the world, he is bound by the duty of self-love to choose the safer way. This we grant; but we disagree with Lessius in that we maintain that this case rarely, if ever, happens, and that, moreover, the conviction one may have that he cannot save his soul out in the world is often considerably lessened by solid reflection (*De Religiosis,* I, § 128).

On the other hand, to enter the religious state is morally impossible for those who are prevented by an impediment, whether of divine or human origin. (These impediments are enumerated in *De Religiosis,* Vol. I, §§ 142–154.) Note, however, that all those canonical impediments, in so far as they affect adults who have the use of reason and discretion, are of human origin. Several of them concern physical defects. This is due to the ecclesiastical law, which for very good reasons does

not consider any kind of religious life except that led in community. The impediment of the marriage bond naturally arises from the nature of the matrimonial contract. Penury on the part of parents, often due to imprudent administration of family affairs, sometimes causes delay, because parents cannot expect outsiders to help them in their need if they allow their children to become religious.

Finally, some persons should not be advised to enter the religious state. These are individuals who are unfit for that state and do not by their disposition and habits give promise of becoming fit in the future. "Owing to some people being ill-disposed," says St. Thomas (Ia IIae, qu. 108, art. 4), "it happens that they [the Evangelical Counsels] are not to be advised to them."

So much as regards vocation or calling in relation to the will of God, regarded as *antecedent.* But vocation in the strict sense, that is in regard to the will of God called *consequent,* remains to be defined. As mentioned above, the *consequent* will of God takes into account man's use of free will and grace.

3. *Definition of Religious Vocation*

Strictly speaking, religious vocation is the special gift of those who, in the Church of God, follow the Evangelical Counsels with the proper intention.

The elements of this vocation are all the interior

and exterior helps, the efficacious graces which have led to the taking of that resolution, and all the graces which produce meritorious perseverance.

Just as faith is offered to all, but, when accepted, becomes a glorious gift, and just as no man is denied sufficient grace to persevere, but perseverance itself is spoken of as a special gift of the elect; so while many are called to a more perfect state of life, there are but few who embrace it. This privilege, therefore, is one of great value, both by reason of its rarity and by reason of its excellence. By virtue of the counsels and the promises attached to them, the act of accepting them gives well-founded hope of more certain salvation and of a greater reward.

But unlike the gratuitous gifts, this gift can be obtained by humble prayer and a good life. In this it resembles the grace of perseverance and requires our coöperation. (Cfr. Bellarmine, *Controv.* "Concerning Monks," Ch. 31, §§ 4–17.)

4. *Ordinary and Special Vocation*

Vocation originates in either of two ways. It is the result of deliberation, when, under the influence of grace, the individual perceives, in the light of the Gospel and from other considerations, that the way of the counsels is preferable for him. Or it may result from an extraordinary illumination of the mind and incitement of the will. In this latter case, the will, before any reflection has taken

place, is so strongly inclined toward the religious state that he clearly perceives he will do something agreeable and pleasing to God if he follows the more perfect way. In the first case we have an *ordinary,* in the second case a *special* vocation.

Of the ordinary vocation Suarez says: "Very often it is better to enter religion without any special desire or inclination given from on high, on the strength of a free choice made by mature judgment after due consideration. For experience and reason make it evident that since it is often proper, nay sometimes necessary, to act thus in other virtuous works, the same can be said of this one. For there is no reason why in this matter we must always await an extraordinary grace or call from the Holy Spirit" (*On the Religious State,* T. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 8, § 5).

One who does not follow the *special* vocation addressed to him, lacks that perfection which in the divine economy he ought to have, and becomes guilty of a positive imperfection.

We deem this distinction between the ordinary and the special vocation to be in accord with the teaching of St. Thomas, who distinguishes a twofold way in which God "speaks" to men,—the one, through Holy Scripture, has all the weight of authority; whereas the other is interior and seizes the mind of man. The latter, he says, is to be preferred to all exterior "speaking." (See the *Opusc.*

"Against Those who Hinder," etc., ch. 9.) Suarez expressly designates as an extraordinary grace, as a vocation in the strict sense, that desire for the religious state "which precedes all human reflection and consideration." (See his treatise *On the Religious State,* T. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 8, § 5.)

But this teaching must be understood correctly. When we speak of an "extraordinary illumination of the mind and moving of the will" we mean a grace which leaves no doubt as to its divine origin and gives the necessary help to the will. Furthermore, the "deliberation" spoken of above is that which takes place avowedly, by a reflex act, and not the usual offhand consideration which everyone is accustomed to give to ordinary affairs. The inspiration spoken of, therefore, is by no means any slight inclination toward the religious state, any reflection on the dangers of the world or the excellence of the way of the Counsels. These thoughts can readily be explained by the circumstances of one's training and an inclination to piety and are merely the beginning of that process which must be carried much farther before it can be called real deliberation.

No vocational call should be neglected, since every call from above is the source of many benefits to the soul. Particularly must the special call of God be heeded, for though there be no strict obligation to heed it, he who neglects such a special call

cannot hope to receive the same fulness of graces in another state than that to which he is specially called. It is to be feared that such a person will feel out of place if he does not enter the religious state and finds he must live a life which is certainly not free from difficulties and dangers. But the dangers to the salvation of those who disregard the special call to a more perfect life result rather from the way of life led in the inferior state, which exposes many to the danger of eternal ruin, than from a divine determination to bestow less grace, or, as some of our opponents say, to bestow graces that are "unsuitable."

Once an irrevocable choice has been made, therefore, no individual should lose hope and confidence, and feel as though he were threatened with the wrath of God.

5. *Signs of Vocation*

There are two signs of a true vocation: the absence of impediments, and the firm resolution with the help of God to serve Him in the religious state.

These signs are indicated in Holy Scripture: "If thou wilt be perfect . . ."; "He who can take, let him take it." Our best theologians, as we saw in Ch. III, require no other sign. St. Francis de Sales says: "A real vocation is nothing else than a firm and constant purpose which a person has to serve God in the manner and place to which God

calls him. That is the best possible mark of a real vocation" (Letter 742).

Perhaps you will demand also a certain inclination of the will. But we maintain that this inclination, unless it be identified with the right intention, is something which cannot be clearly defined, and can only give rise to useless doubts and mistakes. For your hearer will probably understand this inclination to mean that natural relish or desire which is only too often wanting in the best of vocations. Natural inclination is indeed to be taken into account in choosing a special rule or order. For on the one hand there is not the same general call by God to any particular order as there is to the religious state in general; and on the other hand that inclination shows possibility and aptitude, and hence is one of the circumstances by means of which God often directs men.

B. APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES

It is true that in itself the act of entering the religious state is to be classed among the good works which are not absolutely necessary, and is, in consequence, subject to the same rules. However, it is a question of shaping one's whole life. Then, too, it is a great affliction to regret one's choice, even if it has been carried only as far as the time of probation, or to persevere in it unwillingly. There-

fore we say with Suarez (*On the Religious State*, Tr. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 8, § 2) that no man should enter the religious state rashly but everyone who proposes to enter should consider the matter well before he makes his choice.

In a general sermon or exhortation on the choice of a state of life the different states should be presented as being all good, but not equally good, so that the hearer may understand that the choice of any good state is pleasing to God, but the choice of a better state is even more agreeable to Him. Souls should be led to follow the Evangelical Counsels not by threats, but rather by pointing out the great rewards attached to the more perfect state. This is the proper procedure, for by adopting it we follow the example of Christ, of St. Paul, and of the Fathers, who were accustomed to recommend the more perfect state to Christians in this same way.

In individual consultation, when there is no positive impediment, special consideration must be given to the candidate's intention, to the firmness of his existing resolution to embrace the religious state, or to his ability to form such a firm resolution. If the motives are supernatural, and the candidate gives evidence of relying on the divine help, theologians are agreed that no question should be raised as to the candidate's vocation. But if, on the contrary, the candidate's primary motive is a purely human mo-

tive, then we must not advise him to enter religion until that motive has been elevated to a higher plane. In fact those who give no hope of changing their motives to the supernatural level during the time of probation, are to be advised not to enter. We must be particularly on our guard in the case of girls who, trained to piety, are often led to embrace the religious life by human affection for the Sister who taught them, or who are impelled by sentimental inclination, and not by a decision of the will. These must be carefully tested, lest the shaky foundation on which they try to build should collapse entirely soon after they enter.

The candidate's resolution should be firm and hence it is generally demanded that it be proved for a length of time sufficient to demonstrate its stability.

But what about the negative requirement, that is, the absence of impediment? Besides taking into account the impediments set up by the positive law, we must also investigate whether there be anything else that might render entry into the religious state inadvisable. This is to be determined from the general requirements of the religious life and from the special requirements of the order which the candidate wishes to join. Here we shall speak only of the first class, and that briefly.

There is no order which, besides poverty, does not also require perfect chastity and obedience, and some form of community life. The religious

state, therefore, implies the giving up of special affection and of that human consolation which is engendered by the intimacy of married life. For this reason the following classes of persons do not seem fitted for life in the cloister: (a) Those who find it too difficult to observe continence; (b) those who are so attached to their own will that they will hardly be found docile; (c) those who have a disposition different from that of the rest, or are prone to envy or suspicion, or rude in their behavior, and in consequence apt to prove unsociable and disagreeable in a community; (d) those who are so dependent on human consolation that they will most probably fall victims to sadness and dejection in the cloister. In general, it is not advisable to receive persons that are melancholy, or haughty, or unstable, because some folly or inconstancy is to be feared from them.

The decision in these matters rests to a great extent on the religious superiors who receive the candidates. They must take into account the capabilities of the individual candidate and the hope he offers for betterment. The latter is usually present in some degree, proportionate to the goodwill of the candidate and the measure of grace which God bestows upon him.

It is the duty of a zealous spiritual director not only to estimate properly an existing resolution to enter the religious state, but also to discover the

germ of that resolution, so that, with due assistance, he may lead the prospective candidate to apply his efforts effectively in the glorious school of Christ. Here it is necessary to apply the principle that religious vocations often have their beginning in some interior instinct or divine inspiration. These are the seeds which must be nourished and brought to maturity by free reflection and action until they grow into the firm resolution of entering the religious state.

We may distinguish two classes of persons: those who experience unsought internal impulses, and those who say they do not feel any such impulse. In the case of those who feel an internal impulse, the following procedure is necessary. Above all the rules for the "discernment of spirits" must be applied. For though the firm purpose of entering religion comes from God, this cannot be said of any and every impulse towards that state. Therefore, as St. Ignatius tells us in his *Exercises,* in proportion as these interior impulses cannot be explained by natural mental process, and in proportion to the amount of peace they bring to the soul or the frequency with which these impulses come to a man without disturbing him, in the same proportion are we safe in judging these impulses to be of divine origin. There is no reason why we should be disturbed about the object of the thought, namely, a holy life in the religious state. If we

find someone who tries to disregard these interior impulses and vainly struggles against them, so that they are not checked but remain, as it were, dormant and soon break out again as he vainly seeks to be freed from them, we must conclude that the voice of God impetuously calls him to better things and that he has the grace which is able to lead him to make that firm resolution that is the positive sign of a vocation. However, it may happen that an individual, being somewhat in doubt, loves the life in the world so much that he does not think of making any resolve to enter the religious life, yet even while he chooses the married state, feels a desire for the greater good. Such a "scruple," which as a rule will not be very strong, is not to be confused with that interior impulse which, while guiding the will, seems to whisper: "You can, if you will, enter upon the more perfect mode of life."

But what of those who are continually wavering between the desire for heavenly things and the inclination to the married state? We must first of all try to strengthen their will, and for this purpose the spiritual exercises are excellently adapted. If the hesitation continues, they should choose the married state, if an opportunity offers, rather than prolong their useless doubts.

There are others who say in all sincerity that they do not feel any interior impulse, but are persuaded by the Gospel and their own reason that

they can live a more perfect life and more easily work out their salvation by following the Counsels of Christ. If they be persons of stable character, they should be advised to enter the religious life without fear. Just as one who seems to embrace the faith, moved by reason alone, actually receives the grace of faith from the Holy Spirit, so the conviction that one should enter the religious state can come only from God. "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him" (John vi, 44).

There is still another class. In a negative way they lack nothing to make them adapted to the religious life. Their piety and innocence equip them admirably for this state. But if you ask them about their plans, they will answer that they will be satisfied to remain among the laity, or at most to become secular priests, but have never thought of entering the religious state. It would be useless to try to spur them on to higher things, and without that interior impulse, your words could have no result except to cause them useless disquiet. "Such a suggestion [to enter the religious state] will have no effect unless the individual be interiorly drawn by God," says St. Thomas (*Opusc.* "Against those Hindering," etc. § 10). Usually, then, it will be better merely to inquire as to their plans and to see to it that these plans are good, in order the better to dispose them for a good life. In the

same way, in a matter of greater importance, it is almost impossible to recall from heresy one who belongs to a sect in good faith,—an Anglican, for example,—unless he is moved to make inquiry, at least internally. But the two cases differ in this that you can convict the latter of heresy, whereas it is quite allowable to agree with the former when he proposes to follow a good mode of life. Bellarmine says much the same thing (T. 2, Controv. 2, Bk. 2: "Concerning Monks," Ch. 31, § 17).

Confessors should strive to exercise the will of young penitents, to persuade them to act courageously, decisively, and generously, and to convince them that they should by prayer and good works intrust their vocation to the Holy Spirit. St. John Berchmans, when he began to reflect on the state he was to choose, was assiduous in prayer, in works of penance, and in the frequent reception of the Sacraments. Of the little money he had, he gave two-thirds for Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin, and the other third to the poor, and committed himself to the judgment of a prudent confessor. (See his life by Fr. Cepari, S. J., Part I, § 4.)

It sometimes happens that persons are disposed to live the religious life, but are so timid that they will decide nothing except on the authority of a confessor. In such cases it may become necessary

to disclose the divine counsels to them and directly to urge them to enter.

But as a general rule we should rather lead the individual to make up his own mind, since men are apt to be driven rather by their own conviction than by the decision of others. We may note here the following statements of Suarez, which are approved by other theologians. Suarez says (*On the Religious State,* Tr. 7, Bk. 5, Ch. 8, § 10): "If violence, deception, and simony are ruled out, St. Thomas thinks it is *per se* a good work to persuade another, by good and solid arguments, to become a religious. . . . He does not think it wrong to use other human means to gain the affection of another, not indeed to persuade him by human motives, but to induce him more readily to take heed of supernatural motives and reflect on them. However, as I have said, though this is not wrong in itself, yet we must be careful not to go too far, lest we employ a sort of moral violence or deception. Moreover, we must fear the danger of inconstancy in anyone so persuaded, because later, when things have changed, he may easily change his inclination also. The reasons which first moved him will later be forgotten or have no further influence. Therefore, there is need of great prudence in using this method of leading another to the religious state. When anyone asks for advice, we must freely tell

him the exact truth. Furthermore we must help him whom the Holy Spirit has begun to move, so that he will remain firm in his purpose, or at least not resist the Holy Spirit, but rather dispose himself by prayer and good works to be more readily moved by Him. But I think that, before the Holy Spirit begins to call a person, it is rarely advisable to influence that person directly to embrace this state of life, no matter how excellent a thing it be to spur one on to the fear of God and purity of conscience and the avoidance of the occasion of sin, while at the same time showing the benefits and the excellence of the religious state."

Besides giving due consideration to the religious state in general, the candidate must make prudent choice of an order. This choice, according to St. Thomas and other theologians, is not an easy matter. Lessius in his *Opusculum* "On the Choice of a State of Life," (§§ 53 sq.) gives this excellent advice on the subject: "Regarding the order [to be chosen by a candidate ready to embrace the religious life], five things are to be considered:

"First, whether the essential vows are observed, so that there be no private property and no superfluity; that there be no exemptions and no freedom to live as one pleases.

"Secondly, whether the religious discipline is observed. This is shown by the religious bearing [of

the members], by the reverence they show at divine service, by their modesty in company, by their guarded speech, their moderation at table, silence in the house, quiet in the rooms; in fine, by the exact observance of the rule as it applies to external conduct. Nothing is more beautiful and nothing more edifying than the exact observance of the rule.

"Thirdly, whether there is harmony and brotherly unity. For where there are hatreds and discord, there not Christ, but the devil dwells. It is a sign of harmony if the members consort amicably, if they respect one another, if they help one another, and if each speaks well of the other.

"Fourthly, whether ambition has no place there. The religious state is a school of humility and mortification. Hence ambition, by which dignities, prelacies, or honorable positions are desired, is as a violent poison to the religious state.

"If these four desirable characteristics are found in the order you are considering, you can safely choose that order; it will be a safe guide to salvation for you.

"Fifthly, there might enter into consideration also this question: Whether that order has the Apostolic mode of life. St. Thomas says this is the most perfect mode of life, as it combines the contemplative life with the very excellent work of

saving souls, in imitation of Christ and the Apostles. Therefore, other things being equal, this mode of life is to be preferred.

"Besides, the individual should know the duties and occupations which will be his in that order, and the acts of penance and mortification [which he will be expected to perform], so that he may determine whether or not he is fitted for them. Regarding himself, the candidate must consider the talents God has given him, and certainly his health, his natural capacity, his learning, his administrative ability, his natural inclination.

"After thus considering and weighing both sides, it will not be difficult for him to decide whether or not that particular order is suitable for him and whether it ought to be preferred to other orders."

PART II

ECCLESIASTICAL VOCATION

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I. THE TRUE IDEA OF THE SACERDOTAL STATE

As Christ willed to institute in His Church a perpetual Sacrifice and a continual dispensing of the Sacraments, which for the most part can be administered only by sacred ministers, so He also willed that the Church should have sufficient priests to offer up that Sacrifice and to administer those Sacraments. Hence there is in the Church the sacerdotal state, which, as we can readily see from its origin, is established not for the private good of an individual, but for the common good of the whole body of Christians.

The sacerdotal state as such confers on the individual the noblest office and duties which, if they be well performed, imply a practice of charity that is very useful for promoting the pursuit of sanctity. But this state does not directly give one a special aptitude for acquiring perfection. Therefore, there is no Evangelical Counsel advising anyone to enter the priesthood. The religious state as such, on the other hand, confers no honor, but offers the swift-

est way for attaining sanctity, the way which Christ has shown us in His counsels.

However, there is no reason why the first of these ways should not be joined with the second. There are very many priests who are also religious. Indeed, in the Latin Church, all priests are bound to perfect chastity. Very many also are engaged in labors in the pursuit of which they are held to strict obedience to their Bishop. Thus it comes that they may approach very closely the excellence of the religious state.

2. VOCATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

Divine Providence provides that the indefectible Church at no time lacks the necessary ministers. Therefore, there can be no doubt that some are called to the priesthood, inasmuch as they receive the efficacious graces necessary for entering and exercising that state in a holy manner. However, since Divine Providence also looks out for the necessary holiness of the Church, of which the following of the Counsels is a part, nothing has so far been mentioned except what is common also to the religious state. Furthermore, it is fitting that in both these states Our Lord should have some for whom He has the special counsel to be religious or to be priests. In the Gospel we see some called by Christ in a special way to the practice of the

Counsels; again, the first priests and bishops were selected by Him by a very special choice: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John xv, 16).

But while the Evangelical Counsels in general are offered to all, it is certain, on the other hand, that the sacerdotal state is offered but to a comparatively few. (See § 13 of the "Declamationes" of the Abbot Geoffrey, compiled from the Sermons of St. Bernard.) For priests belong to the hierarchy, which God willed to be distinguished from the people. The Council of Trent says: "If anyone says that there is not in the Catholic Church a divinely instituted hierarchy, composed of bishops, priests, and ministers, let him be anathema" (Sess. 23, Can. 6). Now every hierarchy is composed of comparatively few members. We must also add that no one becomes a priest for his own sake, but for the sake of the people, so that the number of priests is determined by the needs of the faithful.

Does not the Apostle (1 Cor. xii, 28–30), when mentioning various offices and gratuitous gifts, deny that these are given to all? "Are all Apostles?" he asks; "Are all prophets?" etc. In the same chapter He distinctly says that those gratuitous gifts are not within our power. He seems to apply this also to the various offices, for he enumerates them all in the same list.

The greatest difference between the religious state and that of the priesthood is found in the "external" vocation, *i. e.*, the admission of a candidate in due form by the competent authority.

While it is *per se* possible for a man to become a religious by his own power, and it is only by human law that there is demanded to-day an acceptance of the candidates, the acceptance for the sacerdotal state is necessary, on the other hand, by divine law. This follows from the divine constitution of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and from the form of rule in the Church. Then, too, the higher Orders are a sacrament which none can confer on himself. This is proved from 1 Tim. iii, 10: "And let these [deacons] also first be proved, and so let them minister"; and from 1 Tim. v, 22: "Impose not hands lightly on any man." The Council of Trent has declared on this subject: "If anyone says that they are lawful ministers of the word and of the Sacraments who have not been regularly ordained and commissioned by ecclesiastical and canonical authority . . . let him be anathema" (Sess. 23, Can. 3, 4, 7). Furthermore we have the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews (v, 4): "Neither doth any man take the honor to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was." Though this was said of the high-priesthood, it can, on the same principle, be applied to the inferior grades as well.

3. WHO ARE CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD

By the will of God, *consequent* to their external acceptance, those are called to the priesthood who lawfully receive Holy Orders. From the fact that God has committed to the Church the choosing of priests, it follows that He wants those to be priests who are properly accepted by the Church. Therefore, the Catechism of the Council of Trent says of the above-mentioned passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews that "They are said to be called by God who are called by the lawful ministers of the Church."

But what of the will of God which we call *antecedent?* You will here vainly and without any solid ground seek that special or extraordinary call by which God speaks internally and manifests His plans. But it is said by the Church that this state is to be entered upon by those who freely seek and obtain admission. Hence it is right for anyone who is *fit* to seek this state with the sincere intention of fulfilling its obligations. This is the reason why the Scholastics and Doctors of the first rank observe that profound silence on the divine calling which so astonished St. Alphonsus (*Theol. Mor.* vi, § 802). But the same holy Doctor, desirous of proving the necessity of such a calling, cites no authors but the rigorists Habert and Concina, and

no texts of Holy Scripture but those which are to be understood of the external call or vocation, as we saw from the Council of Trent and the Catechism of that Council. We disagree with some statements made by St. Alphonsus. He mentions three marks of a divine vocation: Sufficient learning, an upright life, and the right intention. Now what are these marks but that fitness and right intention which, though not proving a special counsel of God, are sufficient for the individual to aspire to that state?

But let it be well understood that we demand with St. Alphonsus and St. Thomas (*Summa Theol.*, IIa IIae, qu. 189, art. 1, ad 3), under the head of proper fitness, not only ability and the required learning, but also holiness actually existing. Although an individual may enter the novitiate though he be as yet not proficient in the observance of the Commandments, it is only with great damage to themselves and great danger to the Church, and in opposition to the mind of the Church, that men whose habits are not well disciplined receive Holy Orders. Hence, ordinarily, such men cannot receive Orders without committing a grave crime.

On the other hand, those who, being fit, desire the priesthood with the right intention, and obtain it from the lawful authority, do something that is pleasing to God. Nay more, since that sublime dignity brings with it an abundance of most excellent

charity and also the Apostolic life which Christ was the first to lead, those who become priests ordinarily please God more than they would by remaining laymen. For this reason unless there be contrary signs of a special Divine Providence, candidates for the religious state are to be exhorted to become priests rather than lay-brothers.

But what of the secular priests? There can be no doubt that, even apart from their sublime dignity, they are in a state which far surpasses that of the laity, because of the vow of chastity they have taken and in virtue of their holy ministry. This excellent state is to be positively approved for those who, while having talent and character, are nevertheless hardly fitted for religious obedience or the community life, or do not give evidence of such a will as to justify the hope of a firm resolution to enter the religious state. But there seems to be no doubt that there will always be very many who will shrink from the additional self-denial demanded by the poverty and obedience required in the religious state, inasmuch as men are little inclined to such complete voluntary surrender of self.

4. INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION ON THIS SUBJECT

The confessor, speaking in the name of Christ, must express the sentiments of Christ. Therefore, he must beware of persuading individuals to join

the secular clergy, or of concealing the better things in such a manner that individuals are turned away from the religious state. With this precaution, it is more allowable, it seems to us, to proceed openly, by using a personal and direct invitation, when encouraging capable young men to become priests, than to use the same means when urging them to enter the religious state. The reason is this: If there be no fear of a lack of talent or of continence, there will not be in the secular priesthood those difficulties which may cause the candidate to regret his choice of that state if made under persuasion by another.

Lest we be understood amiss, let us recall the whole teaching on religious and ecclesiastical vocation. We do not deny that, in case of doubt, we are preferably to choose that which Christ advises. Therefore, the confessor should lean toward the better things, and neglect no prudent means of leading penitents to take upon themselves the whole of the sweet yoke of Christ. But this is not the question here. The influence of others can supply what is wanting to those who hesitate, by convincing and causing them to make their own choice. In consequence, the question arises whether the direct exhortation to enter the priesthood, made to a youth of good habits, involves the same disadvantages which we sometimes—not to say always—find today in that persuasion to enter religion which takes

the place of the individual's reflection on the matter. We say these same disadvantages are not there. For the greater the obligations to be assumed by weak human nature and the greater at the same time the external opportunity of releasing oneself from these obligations, the greater the need of strong character in the candidate who proposes to bind himself forever by these obligations. Who does not see that a man of good morals will not have as great a burden to bear in the priesthood as in the religious life, and that it is easier to put off without great disgrace the religious garb than to put off that of the priesthood? Therefore, as long as you do not hinder the formation or growth of a resolution to enter the state of perfection, you can more easily, without imprudence, directly and repeatedly urge one who is fit to enter the priesthood.

SUPPLEMENT

LAHITTON'S BOOK AND THE DECISION OF THE HOLY SEE

Some years after this treatise had been written, there arose in France a controversy on vocation, especially the vocation to the priesthood. The occasion for this controversy was a book by Canon Joseph Lahitton. The violence with which the dispute was waged is to be ascribed to the necessity, due to a lack of priests, of removing the opinions which put obstacles in the way of candidates for the priesthood. The whole controversy was finally settled by letters from the Cardinal Secretary of State.

At that time, particularly in France, the teaching prevailed that an internal impulse was absolutely required for entering the priesthood. This teaching led to startling conclusions, so that, in a matter which God reserved for Himself, some did not hesitate to maintain that one must rely on human advice and invitation. This excess can be at least partly explained by a wrong custom that had crept in. Before that time, for example in the 17th century, the priesthood or the monastic life was forced upon many young men (and convent life

upon young women) of noble family, who, because they were unwilling, received Holy Orders without the proper intention, or were shut up in a monastery (or convent) against their will, as in a prison. This abuse gave rise to great evils. As a consequence a discussion arose about the evil practice of entering the priesthood without a vocation, and the necessity of an internal inclination based upon supernatural inspiration. At first this was correctly taught, but gradually and imperceptibly it was distorted and almost incredible requirements were imposed.

Canon Lahitton attacked these erroneous views and tried to bring the question of ecclesiastical vocation into line with the definitions and the teaching of the Church. He maintained that *all are said to be truly called to the priesthood whom the bishop legitimately invites and chooses.* He wrote a book which was praised by some and denounced by others, and which suffered varying fortunes even in Rome, until the Holy See itself put an end to the controversy. We give the documents here, with notes of our own.

A. LETTER OF THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE TO THE BISHOP OF AIRE, JULY 2, 1912

"To His Lordship Charles M. de Cormont, Bishop of Aire (Bishop of Aire and Auqs) con-

cerning the book entitled *Sacerdotal Vocation,* written by Canon Joseph Lahitton, of the same Diocese.

"YOUR LORDSHIP:—

"Because of the dissension that has arisen on the occasion of the work of Canon Joseph Lahitton on *Sacerdotal Vocation,* and because of the importance of the doctrinal question raised, Our Most Holy Father, Pope Pius X, has deigned to appoint a special Commission of Cardinals.

"The said Commission, after examining the arguments in proof of each of the two theses, in a meeting held on the 20th of June last, pronounced the following judgment: 'The work of the excellent Canon Joseph Lahitton, which bears the title *Sacerdotal Vocation,* is in no way to be condemned. In fact it is to be approved when he says that: (1) No one ever has any right to ordination antecedently to the free choice of the bishop; (2) the requisite on the part of the one to be ordained, which requisite is called sacerdotal vocation, does not consist, at least necessarily and ordinarily, in a certain inclination of the subject or in inducements of the Holy Spirit to enter the priesthood; but, (3) on the contrary, in order that one may be rightly called by the bishop, nothing further is necessary than the right intention together with fitness (based on the gifts of nature and of grace and sufficiently confirmed by a good life and the required learning), which give well-founded hope that he will be able to fulfill the duties of the sacerdotal state

properly and observe the obligations of that state holily.'

"His Holiness Pius X, on the 26th of June, fully approved the decision of the Cardinals, and has charged me to give this notice to Your Lordship, which you will please communicate to your subject, Canon Joseph Lahitton, and cause to be inserted in full in the *Semaine Religieuse* of the Diocese.

"I pray Your Lordship to accept the assurance of my sentiments of devotion in Our Lord.

Rome, July 2, 1912.

R., Card. Merry del Val."

Comment on this Letter

There is such a complete agreement between the positive declarations contained in this letter (that is, the three points which the Commission of Cardinals praises so highly) and our treatise on religious and ecclesiastical vocation, that we could refrain from all comment, since the foregoing treatise fully explains their decision. But it may help the reader if we sum up the case briefly.

While for many centuries no statements were published regarding the choice of a special state of life which could give occasion for difficulties or controversies, at the time of the so-called Reformation certain theologians, even Catholic theologians, began gradually and imperceptibly to work out a teaching which in time found its way into

the manuals of moral theology as the common teaching. In evolving this teaching they seemed unknowingly or involuntarily to be drawn by the force of circumstances into the errors of rigorism and mysticism. Indeed, do they not at times seem to be influenced by a spirit very like to that of the Protestant reformers, who maintained that the state of virginity is impossible for those who lack the special gift of chastity? The true tradition, impartially considered, opposed such teaching. But blinded by their own system, those theologians could not view tradition impartially. Content to build on a few words of St. Gregory and St. Bernard (see above, Chapter II, § 3), they found in them a tradition in their favor, for which they sought confirmation in an erroneous interpretation of the 7th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The various points of their teaching contradicted one another. However, misled by the authority of some theologians who are considered very reliable, but who are nevertheless not free from error, and had not by any means exhausted the sacred science, they proceeded to swear by their authority.

That teaching rested upon the following premise: There is in the divine plan a certain state assigned to each man, so that if he fails to enter that state, he is in a place not his own and greatly endangers his salvation. Thus by a strange confusion they failed to distinguish a call to salvation, which is a

necessary end, and a call to faith, which is necessary as a means to that end, from the various good means to that end which God has left to man's free choice.

Thereupon, distinguishing the higher states, the priesthood and the religious state, from that which is called the ordinary state, the promoters of that doctrine demanded for the higher states a special divine calling. As a consequence, some more recent writers came to lay down the following proposition: Those should become priests who are called; those who are not called cannot become such.

Nevertheless these authors did not dare to accuse those who did not follow the call of mortal sin. Thus, while very severe in laying down principles and making comparisons,—for instance, comparing those who are not concerned about their vocation to the rebel angels,—they were reluctant in drawing the conclusions which necessarily follow from their principles. However, there were some who acknowledged that, besides vocations that must be followed, there are other vocations which one is free to follow or not.

As a criterion for the discerning of such a higher vocation, many began to apply a certain internal "voice" of the Holy Spirit, which manifests itself in the form of an inclination or a desire.

The opinion which commends itself no less by tradition and antiquity than by its simplicity, does

not deny the supreme authority by which God either makes known or imposes upon some His will in a special manner, prompting them to enter the religious state or the priesthood. But it does not admit any general commands of God except such as are made known in the sources of Revelation. What is proposed as a counsel, is left to remain a counsel.

This opinion makes the choice of a state of life subject to the rules of prudence. It demands in a negative way the fitness of the subject, in a positive way the right intention and one that is sufficiently firm, considering the difficulties. These states can be sought by anyone who is able to enter a seminary or a religious community. Indeed, the more diligently he follows the Counsels of Christ, the more laudably does he seek those states.

The bishops, and under the present arrangement also the religious superiors, are the ones who ordain or admit candidates. Hence it is in their sole power, considering the good of the diocese or the order, to make a decision in each case. This decision violates the rights of none. It perfects the vocation, the calling, inasmuch as it alone makes one really a priest or a religious. It sometimes happens that one is rightly moved to seek the sacerdotal or religious state, but is justly refused by the superior. God Himself sometimes inspires one with a desire the fulfilment of which He Himself does not permit.

Even if one seeks the priesthood with an intention

not absolutely pure, God with His *consequent will* wishes that individual to be a priest (after he is ordained) and is ready to give to him who prays and performs works of penance the grace to live a holy life. This is the evident teaching of the Council of Trent, in opposition to heretics. For this reason he can be said to be called to the priesthood whom the bishop has chosen.

In the right intention and in the circumstances under which it is formed, we see the grace of divine vocation, just as every good inclination is at the the same time our work and the work of grace. The experience of feelings of peace and consolation or otherwise, aids us in discerning which choice is pleasing to God.

Having noted these things, we return to the letter of Cardinal Merry del Val.

The letter first rejects the conclusion which logically flows from the teaching which we oppose. For if God chose His priests directly, the bishop would be excused from injustice only by good faith or ignorance if he denied the priesthood to one who is called to it; for it is the inviolable right of every man to follow the Divine will.

The letter secondly rejects, for ordinary cases at least, the criterion of the divine call by "attraction," by which some writers sought to establish the divine call, going so far in some instances as to maintain that there should be absolutely no advice or direction

given, lest the human voice should drown the voice of God.

Thirdly the letter confirms the simple and true idea of vocation which should be held by all. If there had been no departure from that idea, the human race would have been spared many errors and much useless writing.

B. LETTER OF THE 7TH OF JUNE, 1913, TO CANON LAHITTON

"REVEREND CANON:—

"The Sovereign Pontiff, Pius X, thanks you for the filial devotion expressed to him in the new edition of your work *Sacerdotal Vocation,* and on this occasion repeats the congratulations which he addressed to you upon the first appearance of your learned work.

"His Holiness has already, in the past year, fully approved of the decision rendered, on the 20th of June, 1912, by the Cardinals specially charged to examine the doctrinal question raised by the publication of your book. In extolling the merits of that masterly dissertation, the Commission of Cardinals indicated and praised the important points of the Church's traditional teaching which you had set forth.

"After receiving notice of the present edition, the Holy Father congratulates you anew on your having rendered an important service to the cause of pure doctrine, and as a token of his entire satisfaction grants you from his whole heart the Apostolic Benediction.

"With my congratulations and personal thanks, be pleased to receive, Reverend Canon, the assurance of my sentiments of devotion in Our Lord.

June 7, 1913.

R., Card. Merry del Val."

Additional Notes

In the *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift,* of Linz (1914, pp. 262–297), the noted Father A. Lehmkuhl, S.J. learnedly discussed the question we considered in this book, for the purpose, it would seem, of properly explaining the documents issued by the Holy See, and thereby preventing a false interpretation. He brilliantly presents many points, especially in relation to the preparation required by the call to the priesthood. He relies very much on the authority of Luis de Lapuente, who, while maintaining too strictly that each one can make but one good choice (in which he is corrected by Lehmkuhl, p. 269 of the article mentioned), also says:

"It remains to explain more fully what we must do to follow the counsel and direction of Divine Providence. We can reduce it all to three points. The first is that our intention in choosing a state of life must be a pure and good intention, that is, we must have not a wicked purpose inspired by ambition, avarice, or sensuality, but a good purpose,

such as the glory of God, our own salvation, or the good of our fellowmen.—The second is that we must always apply the proper means, in conformity with the will of God and with reason and prudence. All illicit means are excluded, both those forbidden by divine law and those prohibited by human law.—The third is that we must not act rashly or hastily, or be moved by passion or such vehement inclination as disturbs the soul; but calmly, prudently, and with mature judgment, following the admonition of S. Scripture (Deut. xvi, 20): 'Thou shalt follow justly after that which is just, that thou mayest live' happily this temporal life and the life of grace, and mayest thereafter attain eternal life.

"When you observe these three things in your choice and your determination, you may consider the consequence of your choice as a sign of the divine will, and the design of His providence in your regard" (*On the Perfection of a Christian,* T. 2, Tr. 1, Ch. 3, § 2).

From the second edition of Canon Lahitton's work Fr. Lehmkuhl quotes the following, to which we may add some comment: "He does not seek the priesthood with the proper intention who seeks and desires that state primarily for himself, as the more secure way to salvation . . . The right intention demands at the very least that, having been made a priest for the salvation of souls, you desire to promote the glory of God."

This could truly be said of the French seminarians whom Canon Lahitton had in view; but it does not apply universally. For the Church to-day freely ordains to the priesthood cloistered religious, such as the Reformed Cistercians and the Carthusians; she also ordains seculars to simple benefices which impose only the duty of reciting the Office and saying Mass; and she allows others to occupy themselves with literary or scientific studies.

This does not conflict with the opinion of Canon Lahitton, and we add it only by way of explanation, not as a criticism.

Conclusion on the Various States of Christian Life

At the end of the journey it is useful to look back over the road we have travelled, in order that by linking the beginning and the end of the journey we may impress on our memory the true idea of vocation and of the various states of the Christian life.

Christians, as Christians, are more than once called "chosen" or "elect" in Holy Scripture. All of them have been called by the grace of God to the Catholic faith, which is the beginning of things to be hoped for, and has its consummation in the happiness of Heaven.

All Christians ought to represent and follow

Christ in His life here upon earth; they should follow Him as teaching, when they believe; as commanding, when they obey divine and human laws; as counseling, when they order their life, with greater generosity, according to the wishes of the Master. Therefore, the different states should not be too widely separated, since all converge to the same end. Neither can the power, the utility, and the practice of the Evangelical Counsels be confined to the religious state alone.

To follow the necessary and usual call, a choice of several ways is generally given. This is true to-day even of the humblest classes of men, since there are so many religious institutes in which entry to Holy Orders or to religious vows is made possible even for the very poor. Some, then, are content with the obligations imposed by the Commandments, while others, who add the observance of the Evangelical Counsels, devote their lives more fully to Christ; some take upon themselves the clerical functions; others, either as laymen or clerics, bind themselves for the love of God by the bonds of the religious life.

In thus using their liberty and making a free choice, men are guided by God. For God in His mercy does not fail to provide for His Church, but leads men to higher aims, so that they offer themselves as candidates. Whatever good works we perform, we do by the grace of God. To the more

perfect mode of life, therefore, can be applied these words of the Apostle: "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. ix, 16). And by reason of their coöperation those who are chosen can add with the Apostle: "By the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace in me hath not been made void" (1 Cor. xv, 10).

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